



MOVING THE  
**AMERICAN  
ECONOMY**

***Federal Railroad Administration  
Railroad Trespassing  
Fact Sheet***

## **Background on Railroad Trespassing**

Trespassing on a railroad's private property and along railroad rights of way is the leading cause of rail-related fatalities in America. Nationally, approximately 500 trespassing deaths occur each year, the vast majority of which are preventable. Since 1997, more people have been killed while trespassing than as a result of motor vehicle collisions with trains at highway-rail grade crossings.

By definition, trespassers are on railroad property illegally without permission. They are most often pedestrians who walk across or along railroad tracks as a shortcut from one place to another, or they are engaged in loitering, hunting, dog walking, bicycling, or riding on all terrain vehicles, snowmobiles or even horseback.

Overall, the railroad operating environment is an inherently hazardous one for which railroad employees receive extensive safety awareness training. Trespassers do not have the benefit of this knowledge nor are they aware of current and pending train movements, and by failing to properly use designated crossing locations such as highway-rail grade crossings and dedicated pedestrian access paths, are susceptible to life-threatening injuries or death.

In most states, trespassing is codified as a property crime and a general offense. A number of the [states](#) specifically forbid trespassing on railroad property.

## **Role of the FRA**

The Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) focus is on preventing rail trespassing, not enabling it by making the behavior safe. The FRA's Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety and Trespass Prevention Program is committed to reducing the prevalence, popular indifference and social acceptability of trespassing. To that end, FRA sponsors and carries out wide-ranging efforts primarily emphasizing public education. FRA works in partnership with the railroad industry, state and local governments, and other organizations to sponsor, plan and conduct educational outreach efforts at schools, workplaces, civic and community centers and other venues, to raise awareness and consciousness about the inherent dangers and consequences of trespassing. The involvement of law enforcement agencies and judicial officials in particular are critical to the success of these efforts, since stopping individuals and issuing citations or tickets can significantly deter would be or repeat violators.

On the engineering front, the FRA has conducted [research](#) about the feasibility and practicality of erecting fencing along railroad rights-of-way, including virtual fencing approaches that are more commonly used for security purposes. Other assessments have examined the efficacy of different fencing designs and materials. One project included a three-year technology demonstration of an automated deterrent warning system that employs motion detection sensors capable of physically distinguishing between people, animals or other environmental stimuli. In general, the widespread installation of fences along rail rights of ways is impractical, and many previous attempts to use

fencing on a localized basis have been ineffective as those determined to trespass have vandalized, damaged or otherwise destroyed the structures to restore the unfettered access they were previously accustomed to.

FRA also maintains a [database](#) of trespass casualties (both fatalities and injuries) compiled from reports submitted by railroads as required under Federal law. Heretofore, this data has not included events deemed to be suicides by coroners or medical examiners because they are intentional acts, not accidental events. However, FRA is revising its accident/incident reporting requirements to include such incidents as part of an ongoing research program.

## **Role of Railroads**

The prevention of trespassing along railroad rights of way and facilities is a significant concern for railroads. When a trespass event occurs, train crews frequently suffer from trauma, and railroads incur the cost of delays, equipment damage, and litigation. But most importantly, a member of the community is lost or irreparably injured.

The major railroads mitigate trespassing through their police departments who patrol railroad rights-of-way including areas frequented by trespassers, post “No Trespass” signs, coordinate patrols with local law enforcement agencies along rights-of-way, educate their employees to report trespassers, install fencing near grade crossings and passenger train stations, and conduct educational outreach programs, often in conjunction with Operation Lifesaver, Inc.. And, where appropriate, they support the construction of grade separated pedestrian walkways.

## **Operation Lifesaver, Inc.**

Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI) is an international non-profit, continuing public education program first established in 1972 to end collisions, deaths and injuries at places where roadways cross train tracks, and along railroad rights-of-way. Its programs are sponsored cooperatively by federal, state, and local government agencies, highway safety organizations, and the nation’s railroads. Operation Lifesaver’s trained and certified volunteer speakers provide free safety presentations for various audiences including primary and secondary schools, commercial truck drivers, the agricultural community and others in order to increase awareness about safety hazards around railroad tracks.

FRA awards annual grant funding to OLI to provide grants to 50 state organizations that manage railroad safety awareness programs. The funds also support training programs such as regional workshops developed for Operation Lifesaver’s volunteer trainers and presenters, communications programs, publications, and the development and distribution of public service announcements. Additional information is available at: [www.oli.org](http://www.oli.org).

## **The Average Trespasser**

In order to better understand trespassing, and the reasons individuals are on railroad property, the FRA issued a report in March 2008 using three years of trespass fatality data. Medical examiners and coroners across the country were surveyed, and based on the best information available from those who elected to participate in the study, FRA found that the average trespasser is most often a

38-year-old Caucasian male under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, with a median household income of \$36,000. More than 25% did not graduate from high school.

The report, [\*Rail-Trespasser Fatalities: Developing Demographic Profiles\*](#), includes a state-by-state breakdown, showing California and Texas recording the highest number of such events. The report strongly recommends that additional demographic research and analysis be undertaken to reinforce and expand on these results in order to develop targeted educational outreach programs and law enforcement initiatives to reduce the incidence of trespassing.

**Key Safety Tips to Avoid Becoming a Trespass Fatality Statistic:**

- Always expect a train! This is the most important thing to remember. Whether one is near a seemingly inactive rail line or at locations where there are multiple tracks, a train may approach very rapidly from any direction at any time.
- Cross the tracks only at designated locations. Crossing tracks at any other place is illegal and puts you at risk of tripping or slipping on rails or ballast. There is no margin for error if a train is approaching.
- Don't try to beat a train at a crossing. Detecting or accurately sensing the distance and speed of an approaching train is difficult if not impossible.
- Don't stand close to railroad tracks. A train is at least three feet wider than the tracks on each side.
- Don't ever walk along tracks, over rail bridges or in tunnels. There is often only enough clearance on bridges and tunnels to accommodate a train.
- Don't climb on, over, under or in between moving or stationary rail cars. Even a freight car that is standing on a siding and isn't attached to a train can be dangerous.
- Never try to hop or jump aboard a moving train; and don't try to cross the tracks between cars of a stopped train because it may start moving at any moment.

**For more information contact:  
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